

U.S. Representative Tom Allen
“Special Order” Speech on
National Missile Defense
House Floor
June 12, 2001

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. TIERNEY) for holding this event tonight to talk about national missile defense and the Bush administration's enthusiasm for an untested and uncertain project.

The reason I think it is so important to have this conversation tonight is that it is very clear to me that this is one of the most critical issues facing this Congress and one in which the public obviously needs more information. And whatever the right answer is, we have to have this kind of discussion and debate. We are not going to get it during the regular legislative day, so we need to get it after hours.

In many respects, all of us believe that if we had a national missile defense system that actually worked and did not threaten our security, that would be a good thing to have. The difficulties are several: first of all, we have now spent tens of billions of dollars on the system to date, and we are a long way from having a system that is actually tested and that works. There are scientists across this country who are convinced that this system can never work. It is also clear that to build a system on the scale that the Bush administration envisions is a hundred billion dollars and up. A huge amount of money.

Third, there is a problem. We need defenses that are proportional to the threat. And it is not at all clear that a threat of a ballistic missile attack by North Korea, by Iran, or some other rogue state is really at the top of the list of the threats that we face. Many of us in this room today joined with other concerned citizens who came to Washington with a simple message for President Bush, and for all of us as policymakers. First, the President's fast-track missile defense will make the world less stable, not more stable. Second, rushing deployment of missile defense will provoke other nations to increase their offensive arms and undermine U.S. national security.

In particular, it is very likely to encourage the Chinese to develop more ICBMs, which in turn will make India uncertain and insecure, which will add to a race in missile development in India and in Pakistan.

Third, abandoning arms control agreements and gambling on unproven missile defense technologies is unsafe and unwise. When we look back through the centuries, military history has really been a battle between the sword and the shield. Building a better shield has always compelled the forging of a better sword. The Bush administration needs to explain why it thinks this missile shield is exempt from the laws of history.

As I said before, missile defense might be justified if it could be proven to work reliably and consistently and if we were confident that it would improve our overall national security. But President Bush has not provided any particulars about his proposal. It is only a multi-layered proposal which will protect us against all kinds of threats.

Congress and the American people really have to force this administration to answer the hard questions that they have so far avoided. For example: one, can missile defense technology be proven to work reliably and consistently? To date, the answer is no.

Second, what is the cost? To date, the answer is, who knows, but perhaps tens if not hundreds of billions of dollars.

Third, will national missile defense improve other overall national security? Well, not if we abandon the ABM Treaty and abandon an arms control regime that has kept the peace for 50-odd years.

Fourth, is national missile defense a proportional response to a credible threat?

I serve on the House Committee on Armed Services, which evaluates threats to our security. The U.S. intelligence community recently issued a report on global threats and challenges we may face by 2015. This is shown on the chart beside me here, "Threats and Challenges in 2015, a National Intelligence Council Report."

There are many diverse threats here. Some of them relate to population trends, aging patterns, migration, health and AIDS. Others relate to natural

resources and the environment, access to food or to clean water, the availability of energy, or environmental degradation. Some are related to science and technology, the global economy, or to national and international governance.

There are some threats that do relate to future conflicts, and a national missile defense system protects against one of those threats, that is, a weapon of mass destruction delivered by means of a long-range missile. It does not protect against a Ryder truck or a boat or a suitcase that can be carried into a building or near a building and blown up.

If we look at what happened tragically in Oklahoma City, or if we look at what happened to the U.S.S. Cole, I submit that is the future. Those are the risks that we in this country really have to worry about far more than having some country decide they are going to fire a missile at our country, which would be tracked from the moment it left the ground in North Korea or Iran or somewhere else.

Over the last 55 years, deterrence has worked and it continues to work. Just take one example. During the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein did not use his chemical and biological weapons. Why? Because the first Bush administration made it clear that if he did that there would be massive retaliation. Even Saddam Hussein, in the middle of a conflict, respected the power of retaliation of this country.

My concern is if we put all our money into missile defense, there is no way that we are not going to underfund these other threats to us with the delivery of weapons of mass destruction by other means.

Mr. DOGGETT. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield. The gentleman served on the Committee on National Security, and I know he must have heard many demands to see that our men and women in arms are justly paid, to see that they have the facilities that they need, that all of the branches of the armed services have the equipment and the support that they need.

I listened recently to the former chair of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, Sam Nunn, who noted that we risk the possibility of having vital resources that we need for other aspects of the military all sucked up into this one plan that does not work.

I have been surprised as I have traveled around my district in Texas at how many people who are coming up and expressing opposition to this plan who are veterans who have served and who recognize how foolhardy it is to divert all our resources into one area, and that area being one that is not proven to work.

I am wondering if the gentleman is hearing from other people who are in our military services informally or have served in the military who recognize the danger that has been spotlighted tonight and that former Senator Nunn has voiced publicly?

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman would yield. The gentleman from Texas is exactly right. In my home State of Maine, we have Bath Ironworks where half of the destroyers for the Navy are built. There is no question in my mind or the minds of many people in Maine, those who served in the military and those who did not, if you spend tens of billions of dollars more on a national missile defense system, it will simply sit there. And we will not have the kind of Navy we need to protect our interests around the globe. The same argument can be made with respect to procurement for tactical aircraft. Clearly it can be made with respect to the pay and benefits for the men and women in our armed services.